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Everyday nationalism's evidence problem

The scholarship on nationalism is changing course. For generations, historians and social scientists have been preoccupied with the origins of nationalism. They have staked out how modern state-building processes and the growth of industrial capitalism have evolved and interacted to produce standardised forms of national culture. These mostly macro-structural approaches have sought to explain how nations are made; they have had less to say about how people are made national. More recently, top-down perspectives prioritising big structural forces to explain the emergence and maintenance of modern nations have been both challenged and complemented by bottom-up analyses of the quotidian practices, modalities, and habits that reproduce the nation in daily life. This is everyday nationalism. The masses, it turns out, are not (just) receptacles of nationalist messages, but (also) active agents in the consumption, production, appropriation, and manipulation of their own particular versions of the nation. Ordinary people think the nation, talk the nation, enact the nation, perform the nation, consume the nation – and of course reject, resist, ignore, and avoid the nation – all in ways that contribute to the reproduction and legitimation – or dismantling and undermining – of national forms of belonging. For some, everyday nationalism is conjoined with, and indeed trickles down from, structural forms of nationalism from above: it follows the institutional pathways, the cultural logics, and consumer impulses of top-down forms of nationalism. For others, everyday nationalism operates as a domain in its own right, governed by the mundane rhythms and contingencies of everyday life.

Eleanor Knott (2016) characterises this first approach to everyday nationalism as 'banal nationalism' and the second approach as 'everyday nationhood'. The banal nationalism thesis, elaborated by Michael Billig in his eponymous 1995 book, views the nation as 'out there', pervasively available and reproduced in institutionalised forms, cultural artefacts, and discursive tropes. For ordinary people, the nation is everywhere but at the same time nowhere: it operates in everyday life not as an object of self-conscious or purposeful manipulation, but rather behind the scenes,

informing and undergirding everyday talk and interaction without becoming the explicit object of that talk and interaction. This top-down stealth nationalism supplies a powerful but unseen template for the organisation and experience of everyday life in national terms (see, eg, Billig, 1995, Edensor, 2002, Jones and Merriman, 2009, Karner, 2005).

The everyday nationhood approach, in contrast, brackets this view from above and focusses instead on how nationhood is simultaneously reproduced by ordinary people doing ordinary things. Nationhood in this view is neither invisible nor ubiquitous, but is actively appropriated, manipulated, and enacted as a category of social practice by varied social actors in varied social contexts (Skey, 2011, Antonsich, 2016, Hearn, 2007, Goode and Stroup, 2015, [authors]). This is the now-you-see-it, now-you-don't sort of everyday nationhood, where the nation enjoys variable salience across time and space, relevant in some situations, but irrelevant in others (Brubaker et al., 2006, [authors]).

There is ample empirical evidence of everyday nationhood. This version of the nation is narrated in identity talk (Miller-Idriss, 2009, McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015), implicated in consumption practices (Ichijo and Ranta, 2016, Foster, 2002), and performed in ritual practices (Surak, 2012, Eriksen, 1993). The scholarship on banal nationalism, in contrast, provides a compelling theory for how nationalism operates invisibly in everyday life, but the evidence it marshals is on the top-down, production side of the equation: limp flags and media discourse (Billig, 1995), national music, and architecture (Déloye, 2013, Storm, 2017), unremarkable natural landscapes and quotidian cityscapes (Edensor, 2002, Jones and Merriman, 2009, Lofgren, 1989), and iconographies of film, television, and popular culture (Eley and Suny, 1996, Edensor, 2002). This is the ubiquity of banal nationalism, permeating the daily routines and pedestrian spaces of everyday life, yet impervious to our critical gaze. This is the now-you-*don't*-see-it (and-*can't*-see-it) sort of banal nationalism, where the nation operates 'mindlessly, rather than mindfully' (Billig, 1995: 38), below the radar of ordinary people. But if we don't, and can't, see the nation, then how do we know this? Indeed, how *can* we know that banal nationalism goes unseen, unheard, and unnoticed ([authors])?

This is everyday nationalism's evidence problem: the banal nationalism approach lacks a methodological agenda capable of uncovering the furtive manoeuvrings of the nation as it insinuates itself into the dark recesses of the human mind. The purpose of this collection of articles is to begin address this problem with our own assemblage of methodologically innovative approaches for uncovering the covert workings of banal nationalism among ordinary people in everyday life. Our aim is not to challenge, but to test, the theoretical premises of banal nationalism. We are interested in how we can generate evidence of the nation operating clandestinely as an unreflexive habit, an unselfconscious disposition, and an embodied practice amongst ordinary people in their everyday lives. Drawing on insights from diverse traditions and perspectives, the contributors to this themed section offer novel methodological and theoretical approaches for uncovering evidence of nationhood beneath the veneer of everyday life.

We are not the first to ask this sort of question, nor the first to try to answer it. Phenomenologists, ethnomethodologists, conversation analysts, discourse analysts, and social psychologists, to name but a few, have long been concerned with how tacit knowledge operates 'mindlessly, rather than mindfully' in routine talk and interaction. There is considerably less interest in such questions, however, from scholars of nationalism. Exceptions include Hester and Housley's (2002) foray into ethnomethodological analyses of national talk; Skey's (2011) and ([authors']) shared interest in national breaching (a la Harold Garfinkel, 1967) and the techniques devised by experimental psychologists Hassin, Ferguson, Carter, and colleagues (Hassin et al., 2009, Carter et al., 2011, Ferguson and Hassin, 2007) to uncover evidence of 'subliminal nationalism'. Others, taking their cue from Bourdieu, have talked about national habitus, national doxa, and national capital, all conceived of as partially or wholly submerged modalities of being (see, eg, Edensor, 2002, Karner, 2005, Hage, 1998). With this modest collection of contributions contained here, we would like to build on, consolidate, and expand these insights to develop a purposeful research agenda to address everyday nationalism's evidence problem.

We begin with Michael Skey's focus on 'middling migrants' to uncover evidence of the shifting and evolving 'national frameworks' that underpin immigrants' transition to life in a new country. Skey draws on semi-structured interviews with migrants who have moved from Britain to settle in Australia and migrants who have made the opposite journey to Britain from Australia. He exploits the liminal status of these immigrants to understand how otherwise taken-for-granted national frameworks inform their experiences. Skey positions himself favourably to capture the micro-features of everyday life that make places feel homelier. He employs a Garfinkelian breaching approach to tease out and analyse the ways these homemaking processes are embedded in and informed by national frameworks. Skey explores food, language, the natural environment, and social interactions as sites of national lifeworlds. The national dimensions of these lifeworlds that are invisible to longstanding citizens and residents of these countries are momentarily and contextually exposed by this category of middling migrants. Skey shows us how shifting registers of banal nationalism operate in their everyday lives.

Utilising a rather different approach (though coincidentally in the same Australian setting), Tim Edensor and Shanti Sumartojo produce their own evidence of the workings of everyday nationalism in their contribution to this section. Edensor and Sumartojo posit that national belonging is undergirded by sensations, habits and routines that instil a shared sense of rootedness in place that extends from the local to the national. Serial sensory, practical and social encounters are usually part of the way things are, a dense collection of shared experiences that are not typically subject to reflection. Edensor and Sumartojo reveal how these national sensibilities operate just below the surface by asking their research participants to consider them explicitly. The authors devise and deploy novel methodological strategies aimed at bringing to light the often taken-for-granted sense of everyday Australian-ness. They achieve this by asking their participants to photograph their encounters with the national in the course of their daily routines, thus asking them to observe what they do not normally observe. These everyday encounters with the national track across different private and public locations as their research participants move through the city in

different ways. Edensor and Sumartojo then discuss the photographs with their participants, asking them to reflect upon why they selected these examples, what they sensed, perceived and thought as they recorded them; and how the national was part of their everyday experience. In this way, they bring to the surface how the 'everyday' nation feels, and the occasions on which it becomes particularly salient in everyday life.

Maarten Van Ginderachter faces the added difficulty of uncovering evidence of the unselfconscious workings of the nation in the past. As an historian of everyday nationalism, Van Ginderachter has to move beyond the documentary evidence typically culled in more conventional analyses. Uncovering new sources that can shed light onto the ordinary producers of nationalism, he demonstrates that what those people *don't* say about the nation can be taken as evidence of either the banalisation of nationalism, or, conversely and depending on the context, as 'national indifference', a more oppositional stance to burgeoning nationalism. Van Ginderachter draws on a unique, late nineteenth-century source of working class voices, the so-called 'propaganda pence': short colloquial messages in the local Ghent paper of the Belgian Workers Party. Grassroots supporters used these 'proletarian tweets' to communicate all manner of mundane and not so mundane messages. There was nothing inherently national about these 'tweets', which is precisely why they are an excellent source for uncovering the way an implicit nationalism functions in everyday life. Sampling 27,529 of these tweets from more than 1,000 different contributors Van Ginderachter is able to 1) situate nationhood and ethnicity in a larger social context where they competed with other non-national reference points, and 2) tease out the importance of these contexts in activating – and *not* activating – these national and other frames of reference. His analysis of the ways in which national categories matter in these tweets provides compelling evidence of the situationality of both banal nationalism and national indifference in Belgium's *belle époque*.

In different ways, these contributions to the themed section all identify fissures where the banality of nationalism is momentarily exposed. For Skey, it's the liminal experiences of the middling

migrants: neither fully here nor there in terms of their national identity or social location, they are uniquely positioned to see what others don't see, the banality of the nation in everyday life. For Edensor and Sumartojo, it's the sudden changes and shifts in otherwise mundane routines that provide brief openings into an otherwise unobserved national world. And for Van Ginderachter, it's a multitude of varied discursive practices that reveal the banality of the nation in Belgian workers' statements. These glimpses into the netherworld of banal nationalism do not appear by accident, but by design. All the contributors to this themed section developed bespoke approaches for uncovering what had previously been covered. Individually and collectively, they begin to establish a coherent and focused agenda for generating evidence of an otherwise unseen, unheard, and unspoken everyday nationalism.

But they don't get the last word. That honour goes to Jonathan Hearn and Marco Antonsich, who conclude the themed section with some carefully considered observations about the potential, and limitations, of this agenda. They look more closely, and more critically, at some of its theoretical and methodological assumptions. For one, they ask whether our agenda undervalues the institutional and organisational contexts that give meaning to people's personal national musings. They caution that the radical micro-analytical focus implicitly advanced by our agenda cannot and should not disregard the macro-structural contexts in which individual agency operates. Similarly, any attempt to get at everyday nationalism should overcome the bias of a singular, hegemonic 'nation' also implicit in the banal nationalism thesis. It is not a single banal nation that needs exposing, but multiple, plural, and pluralised banal nations that operate according to different logics for different actors in different contexts. Hearn and Antonsich consider these and related critiques for rethinking why we might be interested in the 'everyday' aspect of nationalism, and how we can best go about uncovering evidence of it without unwittingly introducing new flaws or recycling old biases into that agenda. Their critical, but ultimately supportive, intervention supplies the overall collection with a platform for future refinements and developments.

By attempting to tackle everyday nationalism's evidence problem, we also begin to dissolve the distinction between the everyday nationhood and banal nationalism approaches (Knott, 2016). Everyday nationhood doesn't have the same evidence problem as banal nationalism because it's focussed on the more obvious, flag-waving manifestations of everyday nationalism: the national identity talk and ritual performances of the nation; national forms of consumption and symbolic practices. It has explored the nation when and where it can be seen, heard, and noticed. But it has left undisturbed those other contexts when and where the nation is *un*seen, *un*heard, and *un*noticed. This is the purview of banal nationalism. Taken together, we have the variable salience of everyday nationalism, occasionally foregrounded by ordinary people doing ordinary things, and then receding into the background by ordinary people ignoring ordinary things. Addressing everyday nationalism's evidence problems shows us how banal nationalism and everyday nationhood are two sides of the same coin.

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